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A N
A D D R E S S
TO THE
E L E C T O R S
O F
THE CITY OF BRISTOL,
ON THE
APPROACHING
GENERAL ELECTION.



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AN

ADDRESS, &c.

Friends and Brethren in the Constitution !

A Period very important to you, and to the whole body of Electors throughout the kingdom, will shortly, it is expected speedily, arrive : I mean the time when you are to exercise your personal functions in the Government, by choosing persons by whom you are to be *represented*, as *Legislators* ; and to whom you are to entrust your share in the national property, your share in the national welfare, your share in the national happiness : To whom, in short, you are to *delegate* all your interest, authority, and consequence in the State. On the eve of such an event, I feel myself inclined to offer you those remarks and sentiments which I presume are suitable and necessary ; not doubting but they will be accepted by many (I could hope by all) with the same cordiality in which they are presented.

IN the first place, I humbly conceive, that it would be extremely advisable for you to consider the vast *importance* of your making a proper choice ; as not only yourselves, and your immediate descendants, are interested therein, but your posterity to the end of Time, or, at least, to the end of the Constitution, which, by a due attention on the part of the great body of the People, under the auspices of Divine Providence, may be terminable with Time alone.

IN the choice of persons to represent *you*, or to appear and act in your stead, as *Legislators*,

you are in duty bound to act as Guardians for countless millions yet unborn ; and when you consider that it is a *great privilege*, not acquired (but, too often, rather abused) by you ; transmitted by your ancestors ; made more sacred by their many painful struggles to preserve it ; and left, by them, in perpetuity, to *their and your* successors ; certainly, you dare not *trifle* with so vast and truly valuable a deposit : Nor can you be inattentive to such a *trust*, and preserve the character of good Citizens, or of strictly honest men.

I should suppose, that very few of you are totally unacquainted with the *principle* on which the exercise of this momentous function is vested in you ; but as, in many instances, it seems to have been forgotten, I am prompt to assert it, since it cannot be too well remembered ; namely, that the Democracy, or People, the *strength* and bulk of the nation, the grand focus of *public virtue*, should have, at least, an equal share in the Supreme Legislative Power, with the King, who is entrusted by the Constitution with the Monarchical *power* to put the will of the Legislature in force and motion, or with the Aristocracy, or Peers, who are understood to be the *wisdom* of the State, and to have the greatest individual interest therein : And which share, if it should ever become less than equal to that of either the other branches, would, in fact, amount to a mere non-entity, as being lost or swallowed up in their ascendancy and influence.

THAT an efficient attention to the choice of persons to exercise the popular part of Government, *on this principle*, has not been very conspicuous in the nation for many years past, is, I believe, tolerably notorious ; and that " the influence of the Crown has increased, is increas-
" sing,

" sing, and ought to be diminished," was resolved not very long since, by the Proxies of the Democracy; whilst not a shadow of a doubt can well remain, that the increase of influence in the Aristocracy has not been far behind.

WHEN I mention the influence of the Crown, I would not wish it to be understood (if any persons should be so weak, or so unacquainted with the subject, as to suppose it) that I mean the *personal* influence of the Sovereign; but that which is far more injurious than *his* influence could ever be, were it possible that he *could* do wrong; namely, the undue influence of the Servants or Ministers of the Crown. And, during the present century, there have not been wanting very many persons who have been brought into the House of Commons (to say nothing of their *dealings* when there) by the interest of those Servants; *not* by that of the People, whose Proxies they pretended to have been. Neither have there been wanting very many others, who have been introduced, under the pretext of Representatives of the People, by the interest and influence of *Peers*! Unless, then, the People will *exercise* their *Virtue*, on those occasions, when a new choice is about to be made, there may again be a House of Commons formed, with many of its Members deputed, in fact, by the Servants of the Crown and the Aristocracy.

I believe few men would be bold enough to deny, that many measures very injurious to the interests of the *People*, but which may have gratified the pride, the avarice, or the ambition of Placemen, have been heretofore adopted by a British Parliament, through the interest of those Placemen. And I do not imagine that very many would contradict me, were I to affirm, that,

in the burthens of the State, the men of the greatest *landed* property (Peers for instance) have not always borne any thing like a *proportionate* part with those whose property has been acquired by *industry* (for instance, Merchants, Gentlemen of the learned Professions, Tradesmen, Agriculturists, Handicraftmen, and Labourers.) Neither do I suppose, that many would very seriously dispute my veracity, were I to assert, that these improprieties have been occasioned by the House of Commons not having been *always*, what it ever should be, the pure, unbiased, uncorrupt, uninfluenced, voice of the People, constitutionally expressed by their Representatives.

How, then, it may, perhaps, be asked, can such wandering from the *principle* on which I have been treating, be prevented or checked in the future? I would answer, that it can be accomplished in no other way but by a *proper choice* of Proxies, as I have already recommended; but begging your indulgence for thus obtruding my opinions on you, I will proceed, in the next place, to state *what descriptions of men I deem proper*, and what improper.

I am not now, as Providence has willed it, directing my observations to the Electors of a *rotten* borough, where the *will* of some Tool of Corruption dictates; yet in *some* of these there may be still soundness enough, at the core, to make their *own* election, would they keep their hands from filthy lucre, and cleanse their more filthy consciences from the stain of long practised corruptions. No: I am addressing the Electors of a great trading and commercial city; where, if *all* the votes were to be sold, at the rates they have been in smaller places, no buyer would, I presume, ever reimburse himself; nor would it

it suit a Treasury-Board to purchase them for its creatures. You *have*, therefore, a choice; which many other Electors have not; or, what is far worse, have *bargained not to have*.

I do not conceive it proper to make choice of needy men, nor even of those who, by giving their attendance on your public concerns, would materially injure their private ones; because "*the depravity of human nature is such*," that they may be too successfully tempted to desert *your* interest (tho' you once had a noble example of the contrary!) and may enlist, for the sake of present pay, or future expectancy, under the banner of those who are but too ready to inveigle them from *your* service.

NEITHER would I recommend you to choose men of very large or over-grown estates, nor the apparent heirs to such; because *their* interest is so similar to that of the Aristocracy, that they would be far more likely to burthen the great body of the People than *themselves*. You are not ignorant that such things may have been; nor that it is *possible* such men may have, heretofore, paid so much attention to *their own great landed interest*, as even to risk the starvation of many, whose Proxies, Attornies, or Representatives, they may have been improperly and unfortunately chosen.

NOR am I of opinion, that it would be proper to choose the relations of Peers; because that very relationship would most probably bias *them* from being a *check* upon the Aristocracy; and you cannot be ignorant, that it is the principal beauty in our Constitution, that the three branches are, or rather *should* be, each a check upon the other. The other two branches, I must confess, appear to check the Commoners *sufficiently*.

NOR

NOR do I deem it politic to elect strangers ; persons whom you are under any necessity to "catechise," before you can form an idea of their political principles. I should suppose them less to be depended on, and more likely to deceive you [*such things have been!*] than Gentlemen whose principles and conduct are known to you.

By no means do I approve of the idea, that any persons should be *obtruded* on you by intriguing or purposely coalesced partizans ; because that would be *no choice* at all on your parts ; but would carry with it the positive declaration, that you may, or may not choose for ourselves, as they shall think proper to coalesce or not.

NEITHER would I advise you to make choice of men of violent *party* spirits ; because such persons would be far more likely to seek the gratification of their own inflamed tempers, than either the joint good of the whole community, or the real interest of the Democracy in particular.

WHAT sort of men, then, will you probably enquire, would *you* recommend to us ? Why, the very *contrary* of all those I have negatively described. — Men of respectability, but of moderate fortunes ; so far disengaged from business, that their non-attendance thereto will need no compensation ; whose rent rolls are not excessive ; who are not related to the Peerage ; Gentlemen who are well-known to you, both in *principle* and *practice* ; of your own selecting ; and more conspicuous for the moderation than the violence of their attachments.

IF it should be asked, Where are such to be found? I would reply, that there are not wanting a sufficiency in your own city and neighbourhood ; it would ill become me to point out individuals ; let their characters speak for them.

IT may be objected to this address, that I would wish to excite a contested Election, and, consequently, to introduce all the confusion and disorder too common on such occasions. To this I would reply, that the very act of *voting*, where some voices are for some men, and other voices for others, is itself a contest, and a very laudable and truly valuable one; for that alone constitutes the freedom of Election; but no other contest would I by any means wish, much less endeavor to excite, than that, which men exercising the franchises of Electors, ought brotherly and peaceably to enter into, when they are not unanimous in opinion; and which has nothing to do with the confusion so commonly attendant. The disorders so frequently seen at Elections, are generally occasioned by the bad conduct of those (and *they* ought to know better) who have the management of these affairs; and who, by expending frequently many thousand pounds, not only in the trophies of *hostile defiance* and *inimical distinctions*, but even in the reiterated *intoxication* of the parties, whom they have thus distinguished as *enemies*, as it were, to make them more furious in their attacks upon each other. And, what is still worse (if possible) *the very men* who have been so lavish of their monies and personal exertions, to inflame and inebriate their fellow-citizens, to the perpetration of a variety of mischiefs at one election, shall, perhaps, at another, when they suppose it *their* interest to be united, cry down every idea of taking the real sense of the Electors by a fair poll, lest the same mischiefs should again ensue which *themselves* had been the cause of; and, under that pretext, obtrude the creatures of their *own* coalition.

AN Election, such as I could wish to see, not here

here only, but in every other seat of it, should have nothing to do with party *colours*, nor irritations of any kind. By the bye, how prettily it looks in animals, calling themselves *gentlemen*, to decorate their own heads, or those of other animals, whom, tho' of the *same* species, those gentlemen would, at *another time*, call *blackguards*, with different ensigns of hostility, that they might become more incensed one against another, and better distinguished for mutual attack, or, when it is a *high game*, for murder! Such an Election as I could wish, needs not even the *inebriation* of the multitude, to work them up to *phrenzy*. It would require no threats; no hypocritical promises; nor be creative of animosities. It could not, *of itself*, be attended with more hatred or dislike than a question put to the vote among the acting Officers of a Corporation, or in one of those useful societies called benefit clubs. No, No: An Election, were it merely to consist in taking the votes of the Electors, would be generally, and might be always, very peaceably conducted. But it is *Instigation* which occasions tumult. Very few men would feel aggrieved at another's having so free a vote as himself, much less attack him either in person or character, were it not for the *Excitements* thereto, so pitifully, so dastardly, and so inhumanly held out, by those who should be most distinguished, at such a time, for brotherly love, placid deportment, and all the amiable qualities of good citizenship. Man is the *natural friend* of man: It is only when worked up by those selfish or ambitious beings (*men* I am loth to call them) who have *no natural feeling* for their fellow-creatures, that he becomes, or even *appears*, an enemy. Added to this, it costs infinitely more money, more trouble, and more anxiety, to set people at variance

variance (to say nothing of the mischiefs that ensue) than it would to maintain decorum and good order: And you may have frequently observed, that in all commotions, whether wars, revolutions, riots, or tumults, when the vain, the ambitious, and the *selfish*, have ceased from their horrid instigations and excitements, the bulk of mankind very naturally, and generally very speedily, reassume the habits of peace and good-will; nor longer seek their foreign or domestic neighbours, as their destined prey.

But tho' I would rather see an Election contested, in the manner it should be, than to have the choice of the Electors determined by perhaps *half a dozen* great men, *unauthorized* to dictate, yet I would, could it be obtained, prefer a *general*, a *real unanimity*, to the most peaceably conducted contest which can be imagined. And why may not this be effected? To answer which, I shall, in the third place, point out what I deem the general obstacles thereto, and the methods whereby, I presume, they may be removed.

It is well known, that Elections have, for a long time past, been too much considered and acted upon as mere *party* business; and the Electors have been vilely instigated to variance, by a few leading men, who doubtless imagine they cut the greater figure the more zealously they inflame men's minds in support of their party prejudices. Shame! that the general good of the whole body of *the People*, their preservation from the otherwise too powerful interest of the Aristocracy, and from the otherwise too alarming increase in the influence of the Crown, should be endangered by the paltry idea of one man's professing himself to be on this side, and another on that side of a question, which it is

now

now useless to agitate ; for unless a counter-revolution could be effected in this country, which God forbid ! it matters not who are *called* Tories, or who Whigs. Our Constitution (if we except the *novel encroachment* of the septennial act, with its concomitant, disproportion of suffrages) is, I trust, permanently *settled* : And the only interest of the *People* is to preserve the Government in its present form, by maintaining, to the utmost of their power, the great share which they have in it ; and by *uniting*, for the security of those blessings which they ought to derive from it ; lest, at some future period, whilst they are like unto a *House divided against itself*, they be unexpectedly overpowered by the other branches, and the Commoners of Great-Britain have *no longer* any authority in the State, but become once more the *Villains and Vassals of their Lords* ! — Were this to be properly considered, we should no longer hear of Electors threatening each other with loss of favor, loss of friendship, or loss of employment, because they were not in *this* or *that* **INTEREST** ; for then they would have only **ONE INTEREST**, namely, the general benefit, and *proper* weight of the Democracy in the scale of the Supreme Power or National Will. It is *party spirit*, then, which is the greatest obstacle to unanimity at Elections ; and which can be removed only by a general opening of our eyes, not merely to observe its inutility, but also its baneful consequences ; then should we see plainly what would be most conducive to the preservation of the Commons, namely, a *single eye* to their mutual protection, by maintaining their real consequence and due authority in the State.

ANOTHER obstacle to unanimity is the different mediums through which different people always view the *present posture* of affairs, and that without any cloud of party spirit to dim their sight ;

fight ; for instance, as many persons, professedly attached to no party, approve of the war we are now engaged in ; whilst others, doubtless, as independently, are utterly averse to it. Hence an objection is started, on one side, that such a person would be unqualified because inclined to peace ; on the other, because another person is inclined to a continuance of war : And so will it ever be, on all the great political transactions which shall be the *then* object or subject of the country or times. — But why should difference in opinion about the expediency or the inexpediency of this or that particular public measure, so far bias *impartial* men as to make them suspect the *partiality* of others ? One of the greatest proofs of our own *impartiality* is to be of opinion that others are *as impartial* as ourselves. If the Electors can find two men of known integrity, talents, and respectability, real friends of the People, untainted with Aristocratic consequence, and above Ministerial influence, if they *should* happen to differ from some of you at *this* time, they may agree with you at another : And it should ever be remembered, that every man's opinion ought to be permitted *him* as a sacred right ; not only as he cannot be deprived thereof by any mortal power, but because the love of our *own* opinion is implanted in *us* by nature. — Indeed, if you were to quarrel with one another ever so much, whether you should elect men of such or such an opinion at present, if they were the upright, honest, and proper persons I have been describing, a single change of circumstance, may soon make them agree with you, on the very same topic ; or *you* may be caused to differ from yourselves. You cannot but have noticed what numberless changes in opinion, respecting public transactions, are continually taking place ; — that,

that when men's eyes are open, to see any thing in a new light (and I mean men of the purest intentions) they are surprised they should have been so long in the dark, and are almost angry with themselves, if, perchance, they have ever dropped any positive, much less reproachful or uncivil expressions, on the subject, to those they were before disposed to think in error. — Seeing it is thus, how futile it is, for men, who, as Electors, have, in reality, no other object than the execution of that great and important trust, devolved upon them from their ancestors, for the security of their posterity, to be at variance with their fellows, about that which is so very transitory; and to risk the salvation of the Constitution, the independence of all the Commons, and their own particular peace and unanimity, for that which may exist no longer than their dissention.

ANOTHER obstacle to unanimity is *selfishness*. We are far more apt to consult our own individual choice, than the general choice of the Citizens. How absurd it would be in me, or any man who had a just claim to common sense, to oppose my *will* to that of a great number of my neighbours! Is it not, in fact, supposing, that I can discern better than any person else, or every person collectively? — And how much more absurd would it be, rather than to give up mine *own* way, were I to use all the stratagems, intrigues, and contrivances, in my power, to prevent the peaceable, collected, and congregated will of the number! — Yet this spirit is too often seen on such occasions; and men, instead of joining, for *quietness* sake, in the generally expressed inclination, wilfully oppose the public voice, that their own consequence, or vanity, or obstinacy, or pertinacity, may be gratified; and this

this perverseness is the more or less mischievous, and destructive of harmony and united concurrence, the more or less individual interest those who exercise it are possessed of. Certainly it wants nothing more than to see the impropriety of such a conduct, for men to become ashamed of it; and it as certainly wants nothing more than to have full confidence in your own rectitude of intention, to be unanimous in treating such disturbers of the public peace with the contempt which they deserve.

I know of no better plan by which you can fairly obtain the *general* sense on this occasion, than that which you once adopted (and very salutarily) on another business; I mean, assembling in your various parishes; choosing delegates to represent you at a general meeting of the whole city; and placing that confidence in the united wisdom of such an assembly, as your own previous choice of the parties would naturally indicate, and the impartially of a number of respectable Citizens, so indifferently and parochially chosen, would of course inspire.

HAVING thus taken upon me to communicate my ideas to you at this juncture, on so very momentous and important a subject, I take my leave for the present, and, with the utmost deference and respect, subjoin, that I am

Your very humble Servant, and Fellow-Citizen,

A Constitutional

AND

ONE OF THE PEOPLE.

BRISTOL, JULY 6, 1795.

FINIS.

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A Constitutional Catechism,

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ILLUSTRATED WITH COPIOUS NOTES:

Principally extracted from the Commentaries of
THE LATE JUDGE BLACKSTONE.

To which is prefixed, An Epistolary Dedication,
TO THE HON. THOMAS ERSKINE, M. P.

BY JOHN ROSE.

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¶ It is with peculiar pleasure the Author has to announce the
great Honor conferred on him, since the publication of this
Catechism, by the very eminent Personage to whom he had
presumed to dedicate it; not only by his affability in accepting
the Dedication, “with the same SINCERITY with which,”
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by his pronouncing the Work itself to be “WRITTEN
“WITH SKILL AND KNOWLEDGE;” and, as he
is persuaded, “WITH THE VERY BEST INTEN-
“TIONS.”

¶ This publication has hitherto found its way into but *one* of
the Reviews, from which the following quotation is made.

“ The TEMPERATE and WELL INTENDED DESIGN of this
“ pamphlet will appear in this extract from the Author’s
“ Dedication to Mr. Erskine:” [Here is introduced the
extract, from pages iv and v. of the Dedication.] — “ In
“ the course of this Catechism, the Author *duly PRESERVES*
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“ *TISH CONSTITUTION* which he above expresses.—
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“ is tempered with modesty; and, in the assertion of CIVIL
“ RIGHT, he forgets not the DUTIES of SUBORDINA-
“ TION.” [LITERARY REVIEW, for MAY, 1795.

